

COLORADO

ROAD TRIP

Royal Gorge Field Office



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Partnership Brings Peace to the Arkansas River

By Denise I. Adamic

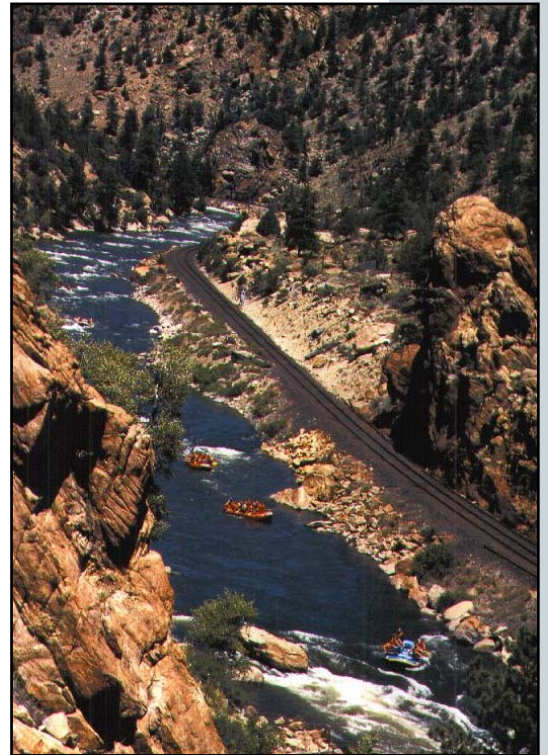
It's high noon and the sun is blistering on the Arkansas River. Tensions are as high as the spring runoff has brought private citizens and commercial boaters to another showdown of users in the river valley. Will this standoff end in a heated fist fight or a boisterous exchange of foul words as so many meetings have before it?

Today the answer is likely no, but this was a common concern and a usual end to many summer days on the upper stretch of the Arkansas River - that is until the creation of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA).

The AHRA, a management partnership between the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Royal Gorge Field Office and Colorado State Parks, is a 150 mile stretch of recreation area along the Arkansas River corridor. The area extends from Leadville to the Pueblo Reservoir. With cooperative efforts from the National Forest Service (FS) and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW), the program strives to balance increasing recreation use with the demands and responsibilities of protecting this natural resource.

In the mid 80s, the Arkansas River's notoriety for whitewater rafting spread, creating competition for river use, not only between commercial boating companies, but also among fishermen, wildlife viewers, campers, hikers, and picnickers. The river soon became known as the busiest in the nation, and recreational users fought to gain access resulting in management problems.

Paul Trentzsch, the renewable resources supervisor for the Royal Gorge Field Office, and one of the forefathers of the AHRA, remembers the days before the plan when he received up to ten complaints a day regarding river use.





“The worst complaint came from an upset land owner whose cattle had allegedly been shot by kayakers disgruntled with cow pies at boating take outs,” Trentzsch said.

Upset landowners took matters into their own hands as well.

“Snake Bridge,” was one landowner’s way of dealing with river use issues. Commercial boaters who floated under his foot bridge found snakes dangling by ropes just a foot above the water. There was no way around the bridge, and as rafters passed, the snakes were dragged through the boat and over customers.

Due to the 90% of river that is accessible from the highway, and the mosaic of state, private, and federal lands in the river valley, the BLM realized it alone couldn’t handle the 300,000 boaters and three-quarters of a million visitors a year.

With this awareness came the creation of a 22-person board that spent 2 years pounding out the details of a river use management plan. The board represented commercial and private boaters, anglers, environmental groups, local governments, riverfront property owners, and water interest groups involved in the river corridor. This original group has now evolved into the current Citizens’ Task Force who meet with and advise managers of the AHRA.



Since its creation in 1990, the AHRA has been a win-win situation for everyone involved. Because of the partnership with State Parks, Colorado Lottery revenues and all profits from the river (such as user fees and 5.25% of each commercial boating company’s gross revenue) go towards the recreational up-keep of the river and its incorporated sites.

Aside from budget issues, this coordinated effort has also resulted in more specialized and better managed aspects of the river.

“Each agency involved can focus on their particular specialties and when things occur outside of their expertise, there’s a group who can handle that situation,” explained John Nahomenuk, the BLM river manager.

All four agencies have a responsibility in this unique partnership. The BLM manages the land and resources in the river corridor, while the Colorado State Parks supervises the corresponding recreational activities (i.e. commercial agreements,) fee collection, maintenance of facilities and public safety related to river use. The FS manages land along the river north of Buena Vista playing host to visitors who camp and hike there



when they're not exploring the river. Likewise, the DOW is responsible for numerous fishing easements, as well as managing all sport fishing along the Arkansas.

This partnership also better serves the public. With the inception of the AHRA, the local communities of Lake, Chaffee, Fremont, and Pueblo Counties have benefited from the tourism the river corridor brings in.



"People who use the river and its surrounding resources stay, eat, and shop in local communities," said Nahomenuk. "50 million dollars have been generated for local communities through the tourism of those who frequent the Arkansas."

The AHRA has been one of the most effective and beneficial federal partnerships in the nation.

"None of this office's other partnerships involve as many people or as valuable of a resource," said Trentzsch.

As a result of the AHRA management plan, users now have well maintained and clean restrooms and changing facilities, hardened recreational sites, boat ramps, more and better river access through land acquisitions, adequate and safe parking, educational activities, an increased sense of safety through the presence of river rangers, trails, improved riparian vegetation, and handicapped accessible sites.

For more information about the AHRA partnership please contact John Nahomenuk, BLM river manager, at 719.539.7289.

BLM Royal Gorge Field Office Shows Public Lands Users the Benefits of Managed Recreation

By Denise I. Adamic

Seeing is Believing – This is a reality on the roadways and trails of Colorado's scenic backcountry. The majestic vistas and recreational variety of South Central Colorado draws outdoor lovers of all kinds to this picturesque playground. However, at the Royal Gorge Field Office, this age-old motto has taken on a different meaning for travel and recreational planners who have spent the last two years creating the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan.

The plan's goal is to curb excessive travel by limiting use to designated routes instead of already existing roads and trails. This means trying to organize the numerous tracks and trails leading to one point into only one path of traffic. Travel planners hope that by showing users the benefit of managed recreation they can encourage users to become believers in, and champions for, travel management on public lands.



The Gold Belt Travel Management Plan incorporates 138,600 acres of BLM land within a boundary area of 564,600 acres. It stretches north from Highway 50 in Cañon City and Florence, to the communities of Cripple Creek and Victor; and west from Highway 115 to Highway 9. The plan area includes portions of Fremont, Teller, Park, and El Paso Counties, as well as the Gold Belt Tour National Scenic Byway and the Garden Park Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Vital to the effectiveness of this plan is the way technology has been used. Specifically, Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) programs have helped planners to better research, organize, and plan recreational use on the Public Lands north of Cañon City.

Early in the planning process, plan managers rode trails with motorized recreation users, walked trails with members of environmental and conservation groups, and visited with local land and ranch owners to record every roadway by GPS and thoroughly understand the travel use issues.

“We systematically drove, ATV, or hiked each road, trail, and route to map and catalog every path of transportation out there,” said Joe Vieira, a natural resource specialist at the Royal Gorge Field Office. “We determined where there were existing roads, and then listed them in terms of width, type of use, and the conditions along each road.”

This classification capability was made possible by using GPS data recorders and helped planners gather information in a visual way that was new to travel management. For the first time, areas of travel could be cataloged and viewed similarly to how mineral plats, and land status lines were recorded. Also, the technology gave planners the ability to accurately calculate mileages of road systems, as well as determine travel use effects, such as erosion, on resources.

“With this science, we have a way to clearly show the resource impacts that roads and trails have on the land,” explains Dave Walker, an outdoor recreational planner who led planning efforts for the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan. “One of the things we could do in this project was calculate the mileages of routes available under four different travel management alternatives, and then show the amount of soil that would be lost under each scenario.”

Aside from helping travel management planners in research and analysis, technology was extremely important to helping the public understand the effects that their recreational activities were having on public lands.

During the planning process, planners used programs that gave the public ways to visualize what they couldn't physically experience, such as the number of traffic systems and how travel has increased over the last 20 years. Planners presented people





with time-enhanced graphics showing the growth in user population, overall maps of travel routes in a given area, and gave projected effects of unmanaged use.

“It’s like a light bulb goes on when people see the information presented to them,” said Vieira. “No one likes tighter management of public land, but through these presentations people can see the necessity for travel management and how it can help preserve the area and resources.”

Through the use of this technology, people are not only hearing information about how unmanaged use might cause erosion, but they are now seeing projected models of how the erosion might occur.

“Most public lands users really care about the environment,” explained Vieira. “It’s just that few truly understand the negative impacts of unmanaged land use until they see them first hand.”

During the planning of the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan, technology helped planners make abstract numbers and use figures more concrete while helping the general public see first hand the travel issues daily facing the BLM.

Thanks to the science, technology and dedication of this planning group, seeing is believing for many public land users. Now, travel planners can better determine the effects of enjoying “God’s Country” and users for years to come can believe in the importance of managing this little piece of heaven.

For more information about the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan please contact Dave Walker, outdoor recreation planner, at 719.269.8500.

